6: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945)1954 ND12 Nahane ND12
: Upper Liard

MAKING A LIVING

TECHNOLOGY

UPPER LIARD KASKA. The basic techniques through which the aboriginal peoples of the upper Liard converted stone, skins, and other materials into tools, clothing, and similar useful products were as uncomplex as the group's social organization. The basic tools came from pecked and polished, close-grained stone or flaked, siliceous rock. Lithic implements included axes, knives, scrapers, and crude pestles. The last need little further description than to say that they consisted of naturally smooth stones employed for pounding meat or cracking bones to expose the much relished marrow. The degree of refinement that these pounders originally lacked was soon acquired through repeated usage. While simple adzes of unhafted caribou could be recalled clearly by informants, memories remained much less reliable concerning the process by which the stone ax came into being. According to one man a "smooth" rock was thrown against another stone causing the former to fracture. Pecking then produced a cutting edge on one of the fractured edges. Finally the head, probably after polishing, was hafted in a birch handle and securely lashed in place. The efficiency of such an ax remained so limited that horn adzes were regarded as eminently more satisfactory for cutting down growing timber. A careful man took good care of his ax, probably because of the time and energy required to work not only the stone but also the hard birch wood. Knives varied in size depending upon their intended use, the smaller blades serving for woodworking and the larger for skinning and butchering. The handling of stone in the process of blade making could not be recalled. Our principal informant (O) spoke of the stone being fractured between two flint wedges and claimed that men wore double gloves in this task. Blades were usually hafted in handles of goat's horn. In use a woodworker drew his knife toward the body. The existence of a beaver tooth drawknife such as Osgood describes could not be certified.[1] For women to use in skin processing men made a variety of scrapers. One of these instruments, used to soften a hide after the hair had been removed, consisted of a thin chipped stone mounted in a wooden handle from one to three feet in length. No semilunar knife could be recalled.

Clay found little employment in technology except for preparing fireplaces on rafts. The most dependable informant (O) knew nothing about solid clay vessels but his contemporary (X) had heard of clay-lined spruce-bark containers for boiling meat.

Bone possessed utilitarian value and provided knives, scrapers, awls, needles, and arrow points. Eating knives resulted from cutting with a flint knife a piece of softened bone taken from the lower joint of an ungulate and then hafting the blade in a handle of goat's horn. Fleshers used in cleaning hides were obtained by cracking the shaft of a caribou leg bone and sharpening the transverse fractured surface until it formed a smoothly tapering edge. Awls for sewing and bark basketry consisted of sharpened

[1] Osgood, *Ingalik Material Culture* (1940), 87. A beaver-tooth knife for woodworking is found among the Tsimshian and Tlingit. Drucker, *Culture Element Distributions: XXVI, Northwest Coast* (1950), 183.

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283 in warm weather but for a week during winter. Summer babiche broke easily in comparison to the winter variety. Cold weather drying also rendered the line softer and more flexible. Stretching frames for drying babiche were not generally used, although for hasty drying such line might be wrapped around a snowshoe. From fully tanned and [462] smoked hide came smoked-skin line, of whose manufacture little need be said. Men collected the roots for spruce-root cordage but all subsequent stages of manufacture were carried out by women who scraped the roots with a stone knife and then boiled them for about half an hour. The worker then split each root, smaller ones being split only once but very thick roots four times Occasionally spruce roots were braided. This line kept best when loosely hung up and tended to spoil if wound tightly. When spruce roots became hard and dry, they could be softened with grease but urine was never used for this purpose. Whole willow line, made in emergencies to pack meat, consisted of a long willow branch softened by heating over fire and then twisted until the fibers had been well broken. Willow bark line found a host of uses and yielded material for fish nets. Willow roots, collected by men, were softened through an hour's boiling, split, and then used for cordage. To manufacture grass line women gathered the high sedge growing along lake shores. Bundled into sheaves for transportation back to camp, the material had to be fabricated quickly before it dried. Twisting converted the grass into line that remained useful for only a short period of time. When confronted with the information that the Tahltan had woven goat's wool into blankets our informant (O) opined that the Kaska must have done the same thing.[6] Among the knots commonly applied to the 284 foregoing types of cordage are the running noose, bowline, and overhand. Two ends of babiche were spliced by means of a sheet bend.

412 *Dease River Kaska.* Stone tools constituted the basic equipment in the Dease River area. A flintlike stone as well as obsidian provided materials for blades which were then 324 hafted in handles of horn or spruce and birch wood. Sinew or babiche line secured the 281 hafting. To protect blades men or women manufactured scabbards from smoked caribou hide. The container attached under the outer belt of a person's garments. Although a woman had her own knife its form did not differ from the man's and the objects were [789] designated by a common term. Before beginning to chip stone a man might swing a bullroarer while repeating the song, "thunatis, thunatis." The charm caused his magical power to aid him in the work.

323 Concerning work in clay, we found it impossible to check the testimony of one informant (S) that vessels used to be shaped from this substance and hardened by firing.

321 The caribou or goat's horn adze served as a basic tool for woodworking and stone 401 axes were denied. Men split logs with wooden wedges and used spruce barking tools to assist them in peeling spruce bark.

321 Bone constituted an important material for knife blades, the material being "scraped" 412 to an edge and hafted in a horn or wooden handle. Women used skin fleshers derived from the leg bone of the caribou as well as obsidian scrapers for removing the hair of a hide. Sewing needles of fish bone are said to have been of recent introduction, supplanting bone awls. Unprocessed moose horn provided an ice chisel as well as material for

[6] Teit, *On Tahltan (Athabaskan) Work* (1912), 485.